

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON 11/1/77 36..U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT
15 August 1977*We've Been Asked***THOSE CONTROVERSIAL PLANES FOR IRAN***From Top Authorities Come Answers to Questions on Topics in the News*

The airplane called AWACS that Iran wants to buy—what is the fuss all about?

This is the most sophisticated and expensive aircraft in the world. Although the Carter Administration was ready to sell seven of them to Iran at a total cost of 1.2 billions, critics in Congress oppose the deal on the ground that Iran neither needs nor can maintain such an advanced aircraft. They fear that some of America's most valuable technology might fall into Soviet hands. Congressional opposition has forced the President to defer a final decision.

What does AWACS do?

AWACS, which stands for Airborne Warning and Control System, performs extraordinary feats in detecting enemy aircraft at a long distance and can direct friendly warplanes to meet an attack. The aircraft itself is a Boeing 707, a commercial airliner, but it is specially equipped with a rotating dome that acts as an antenna and aerial. It is packed with the most complex computers available and other electronic equipment.

How does it differ from ordinary radar?

One of the most important differences is the "look-down capability" of AWACS, which no other radar possesses. From an altitude of 25,000 to 30,000 feet, the radar on these planes can spot fast-flying, terrain-hugging aircraft and cruise missiles that were virtually undetectable in the past. Also, AWACS can "see" over a maximum range of 350 nautical miles, far over the horizon and deep into enemy territory. That means that an AWACS aircraft on patrol over West Germany can spot Russian pilots climbing into their airplanes on bases across much of Czechoslovakia and Poland. And it can identify a penetrating aircraft instantaneously as friend or foe.

And how about its enormous computer power?

The computers enable AWACS literally to command friendly planes in an air battle. They can determine the speed and direction of enemy warplanes and advise friendly commanders on the course to take and the mode of attack to maximize chances of a kill. They also can record armament carried by

ic equipment would not be included in the AWACS offered to Iran.

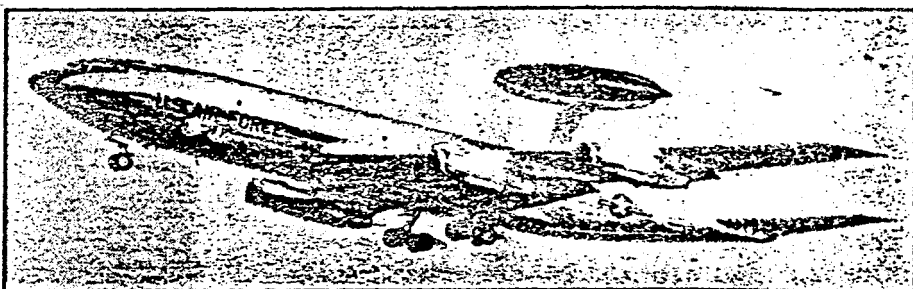
How vulnerable is the AWACS to enemy air attack?

There is a lively and still unresolved debate on that issue. A General Accounting Office report in 1975 maintained that the Air Force had failed to demonstrate that the plane could survive an air war over Europe or that it could overcome jamming by relatively inexpensive Soviet electronic devices. Air Force officials insist that the AWACS would operate in circumstances where it could be effectively defended. They also assert that it can counter Soviet jamming.

What is the cost of the AWACS?

Each plane currently is estimated at 131 million dollars, far more than

any Soviet air attack and to defend his cities and vital installations. The U.S. General Accounting Office, however, submitted a report to Congress questioning the sale of AWACS to Iran. On the basis of information from Defense and State Department experts and from Stansfield Turner, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the GAO warned: "AWACS could significantly increase the offensive capability of Iran's armed forces.... AWACS is designed for a more sophisticated threat than that faced by Iran." It said that the sale may involve security risks endangering highly secret American technology. Congress threatened to block the sale, which, some lawmakers alleged, violated the Carter Adminis-



Seven AWACS, computer-packed aircraft that can control air battles, have been ordered by the Shah of Iran. But the 3.2-billion-dollar deal is stalled in Congress.

the cost of any other aircraft yet produced, including the canceled B-1. The price ultimately will depend on the numbers of AWACS that Boeing turns out. Funds have been allocated for three research-and-development models and 16 operational planes. The Pentagon target is for a total of 28 by 1980. The Air Force hopes to reduce the per-plane cost by finding foreign buyers to increase the production run.

Is there a big foreign market?

NATO is the biggest potential buyer. But negotiations for the sale of 32 AWACS to that organization at a cost of 2.2 billions have bogged down because of a dispute over financing. The Pentagon sees the sale of seven AWACS to Iran as its best bet for spreading the costs of the project.

Why does Iran need the world's most expensive and most sophisticated aircraft?

The Shah of Iran is convinced that

tration's policy of limiting foreign arms sales.

Why is President Carter determined to sell AWACS to Iran?

That is a puzzle to congressional leaders and many Administration officials. They point out that the deal seems to flout the President's policy of cutting back drastically on foreign arms sales and barring delivery of such sophisticated weapons to developing countries that are unable to maintain them. The Administration has been loath to publicize what expert observers say are its real reasons for supporting the deal. One is the desire to preserve close relations with Iran, a major source of oil for the United States as well as Israel. Another is the fact that AWACS operating over Northern Iran would provide invaluable additional intelligence concerning Soviet missile testing and other secret military activities. Carter is expected to use